

Hard Day's Night

A Retrospective on the American Intervention in Somalia

By R. D. HOOKER, JR.

Almost a generation has passed since the tragic events of October 3, 1993, when 18 American Soldiers died in the streets of Mogadishu. The fallout from Somalia was both severe and long lasting. It brought a halt to the aggressive multilateralism that initially gripped the Clinton administration, preventing any response to the Rwandan genocide that followed just months later. It limited the range of possible responses to crises in Bosnia and later Kosovo. It severely jolted the Nation's confidence in its national security leadership. It shook the Clinton administration to its roots and destroyed its Secretary of Defense. And it induced an excessive caution and hesitancy in U.S. foreign and security policy that powerfully inhibited the administration's response to repeated acts of terrorism. In ways large and small, Somalia held American foreign policy in its grip for the rest of the decade.

DOD (Terry Mitchell)

Marines surround weapons
cantonment of warlord Mohammed
Farah Aideed, Mogadishu



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America lost heavily that day, both in human terms and in international standing. The causes of the disaster were both political and military and existed at every stage: at the national strategic level, where policy objectives and the goals to be pursued were fundamentally and tragically vague and ambiguous; at the operational level, where the size and composition of U.S. forces in Somalia, the command relationships established, and the missions assigned were fatally flawed; and on the ground, where secrecy, organizational rivalry, and hubris combined lethally to bring about disaster. In the years since, the heroism and fortitude of the Soldiers who fought there have been celebrated. But the deeper lessons of the Somalia debacle remain painfully obscure.

Background to Intervention

American involvement in Somalia grew out of a preexisting Cold War fear of Soviet intervention in the Horn of Africa. Emerging from British and Italian colonialism in 1962, Somalia quickly succumbed to tribal strife. Under General Siad Barre, military dictator from 1969 until his ouster in 1991, Somalia embraced socialism and Soviet assistance until Moscow's tilt toward Ethiopia in the mid-1980s. Thereafter, Somalia inclined toward U.S. sponsorship, receiving arms and assistance before degenerating into civil war in 1990. In January of 1991, Barre was defeated by General Mohammed Farah Aideded, leader of the Habr Gidr subclan and a product of Italian and Soviet military schooling, with Barre fleeing into exile in Nigeria. A victorious Aideded occupied south Mogadishu, the capital and only major port of entry in the country. For the next year, rival clans battled for supremacy before agreeing to an uneasy ceasefire on March 3, 1992.

By that time, the international community stood horrified at the images of mass starvation beamed into its living rooms by the news media. Up to 300,000 Somalis are thought to have perished in the year preceding the ceasefire. One authoritative government source reported the probable death of 25 percent of all Somali children.¹ In April, a small team of unarmed United Nations (UN) observers arrived to monitor the ceasefire, and in August the first UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I) began.

Supported by U.S. flights out of Mombassa, Kenya, and a Pakistani troop presence

at the port of Mogadishu, UNOSOM I (called Operation *Provide Relief* by the U.S. military) faltered quickly. Although large quantities of relief supplies arrived in Somalia, they were rapidly looted or hijacked, while relief workers and personnel from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were assaulted and killed. Aid workers operating inside Somalia reported that food supplies were being intentionally denied to targeted populations and rival clans, spawning a manmade famine of epic proportions. In the fall, the UN reassessed its operations and called for major troop contingents from participating countries to provide military security for the humanitarian assistance mission.

A Promising Start

At this point, President George H.W. Bush made the fateful decision to lead a large-scale international intervention to halt the mass starvation that had shocked the world. President Bush seemed personally moved by the vast scale of the suffering in Somalia; having lost his bid for reelection, Mr. Bush could garner no political benefit or advantages from intervention, and no American vital interests were engaged. His guidance was simple and direct: get in fast and stop the dying. The administration policy focused almost exclusively on providing security for humanitarian assistance, with no mention of nationbuilding or long-term stability operations.²

Beginning in early December, large numbers of U.S. troops began moving toward the Horn of Africa. At month's end, more than 28,000 Marines and Soldiers from the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) and 10th Mountain Division had arrived. The Unified Task Force (UNITAF) was established under I MEF commander, Lieutenant General Robert Johnston, who controlled all U.S. and UN forces.

Based in Mogadishu but with major elements in outlying cities, such as Bale Dogle, Baidoa, Oddur, Merca, and Kismayu, and supported by 10,000 coalition soldiers from 24 countries, UNITAF quickly established order. The force that went into Somalia that December was muscular and well armed, with liberal rules of engagement that allowed U.S. Soldiers to engage any armed Somalis thought to pose a threat.³

In addition to overwhelming military force, the American-led intervention featured a small but experienced diplomatic

effort, headed by U.S. Special Envoy Robert Oakley. With experience as a senior National Security Council staffer and Ambassador to Pakistan, Zaire, and Somalia, Oakley was well known to the major faction leaders and well versed in internal Somali politics and rivalries.⁴ Significantly, Oakley's U.S. Liaison Office (USLO) (in the absence of a functioning central government there was no U.S. Embassy) was sited near Aideded's personal residence in south Mogadishu and was guarded by only six U.S. Marines.

On the ground, both Johnston and Oakley worked to coordinate political and military efforts to rush humanitarian assistance to threatened areas. Military officers were seconded to Oakley's staff, and UNITAF provided senior, experienced liaison officers to meet regularly with USLO, UN, and NGO agencies. Both military and civilian representatives worked together in Civil-Military Operations Centers in the capital and in outlying areas to plan and execute humanitarian assistance operations. Somalia was organized into large Humanitarian Relief Sectors, each placed under a capable coalition unit, to ease coordination and command and control challenges.⁵

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Somali leaders were brought together frequently in the neutral setting of the USLO compound to hammer out solutions to local conflicts in meetings brokered by Oakley.

At the outset, Somali faction leaders were told politely but firmly that, while the intention was not to impose any particular ruler or system of government in Somalia, no armed threat would be permitted to challenge U.S. or UN troops. All "technicals" (that is, civilian trucks and vehicles modified to mount heavy weapons) were required to be stored in monitored cantonment areas, and no weapons could be carried visibly in public.

The results were immediate and dramatic. Within a month, massive amounts of food aid were flowing freely, and the death toll from starvation had dropped exponentially. Armed clashes between warring

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factions had declined precipitously, and U.S. casualties were low. Although nominally a UN operation, Operation *Restore Hope* was clearly a U.S.-led effort. Both Aideed and Ali Mahdi, anxious to position themselves as future national leaders with U.S. backing, generally cooperated with U.S.-sponsored initiatives to encourage local and regional collaboration. In Mogadishu and elsewhere, joint councils actually emerged to manage port operations, police functions, and other forms of public administration.

components, clear political guidance, and a distinct policy of noninterference in the murky waters of local Somali politics. While attempts were made to support local and national reconciliation to ease clan rivalry and support humanitarian assistance, nationbuilding was never allowed to emerge as a primary goal. In sharp contrast, the UNOSOM II effort (dubbed Operation *Continue Hope* by U.S. military planners) envisioned indefinite time horizons, far weaker military forces, more ambitious and ambiguous political goals, and a more idealistic

political reconciliation goals and charged UNOSOM II to disarm the Somali clans, a fateful step that presaged the failures that would soon follow.

To ensure U.S. control, retired Admiral Jonathan Howe was named to head UNOSOM II as the Secretary General's special representative. Howe had recently served as deputy National Security Advisor and was therefore experienced in the interagency process and, presumably, read in on the complexities of the mission in Somalia. Polished and articulate, as

the focus changed from "stopping the dying" to rebuilding Somali national institutions, infrastructure, and political consciousness

a military officer he represented both nonpartisanship and a willingness to take direction and follow orders. Major General Thomas Montgomery, a tank officer serving on the Army staff, was named as commander of U.S. Forces in Somalia and deputy commander of UNOSOM II's military forces (under Turkish Lieutenant General Cevik Bir). Significantly, however, UNOSOM II lacked a trained military staff and important communications and intelligence systems. Even Montgomery's own U.S. combat forces were placed under U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) operational control, 7,000 miles away. An ad hoc organization beset with conflicting national agendas and interests, UNOSOM II was poorly suited to conduct major combat operations. Very quickly, things began to go wrong.

Driven by a strong desire to pull U.S. forces out, American troop presence in Somalia declined from 17,000 in mid-March to 4,500 in early June as UNITAF disbanded and I MEF went home. Although many coalition units remained, most of the credible combat capability resident in Somalia left with the Americans. This dramatic reduction in U.S. military force coincided with aggressive actions to force various Somali militias to disarm. As Aideed ruled south Mogadishu with his Somali National Alliance (SNA), where UN forces were concentrated, UNOSOM II pressed the Habr Gidr hard. Predictably, there was resistance, and UNOSOM II began to take casualties. Almost immediately, national contingents began to suspend activities that placed them at risk of reprisal. Increasingly, Howe and Mont-



U.S. Embassy compound in Mogadishu, location of Headquarters, Joint Task Force Operation *Restore Hope*

The process was not smooth. Simmering clan tensions and occasional clashes persisted, and attempts to encourage cooperation between rival factions failed as often as they succeeded. Still, the primary task of "stopping the dying" was a major success. Throughout, the U.S. approach was consistent and focused: do not take sides, concentrate on the humanitarian mission, and avoid direct confrontation where possible—and when not, act forcefully and directly. By the end of President Bush's term of office on January 20, 1993, death by starvation had largely ceased and open clan warfare had diminished drastically.

Change of Mission

The U.S. mission to Somalia, Operation *Restore Hope*, changed dramatically after President Bill Clinton's inauguration. The operation had been characterized by a short-term focus, overwhelming force, close cooperation and liaison between its political and military

and ideological tone and character. Under President Bush, the mission was humanitarian assistance. Under President Clinton, the mission would become far more expansive.

The nature of the U.S. mission in Somalia began to change almost from the day President Clinton took office. His national security team lacked experience but not confidence,⁶ and within weeks of the inauguration, a strong shift in policy began to emerge. The focus now changed from "stopping the dying" to rebuilding Somali national institutions, infrastructure, and political consciousness; from the United States to the UN; and from overwhelming military force to the smallest possible American military footprint.⁷ On March 26, 1993, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolution 814, creating a successor organization in Somalia, UNOSOM II. Among other things, the resolution committed the UN to more expansive national reconstruction and

gomery turned to the lone remaining U.S. light infantry battalion for the hard missions.

On June 5, in an attempt to search one of Aided's heavy weapons storage areas, a Pakistani unit was badly mauled. In a lengthy firefight, Aided's militia killed 23 and wounded 59. UNOSOM II's Malaysian armor and the American Quick Reaction Force (QRF) were unable to intervene in time to prevent the heavy loss of life. From that date, everything changed in Somalia.

Both the UN and U.S. Government reacted heatedly. On June 6, the UN Security Council approved a resolution explicitly calling for the "arrest and detention for prosecution, trial and punishment" of the perpetrators of the attack on the Pakistanis.⁸ Despite later attempts to distance the Clinton administration from this action, there is little doubt that the U.S. Government not only supported but also forcefully promoted this response.⁹

Howe immediately requested special operations forces, and while the administration pondered a response, UNOSOM II stepped up its operations against Aided. In mid-June, U.S. forces attacked a radio station and ammunition dumps and struck targets throughout the city with AC-130 Spectre gunships.¹⁰ On July 12, U.S. forces conducted

a major raid on the "Abdi house," the scene of a meeting of SNA leaders to discuss UN reconciliation proposals. Many were not in agreement with Aided and were supportive of efforts to end the tribal infighting and encourage foreign aid and investment. Nevertheless, ground troops and Cobra helicopters firing heavy antiarmor missiles destroyed the building with heavy loss of life. Fifty-four Somalis were killed, and in the ensuing rioting, four Western journalists attempting to cover the event were torn apart by the enraged crowd.¹¹ The Abdi house raid went far to unify Aided's people solidly against the Americans and raised the conflict to a new level. Its importance in changing Somali attitudes is hard to overstate.

On August 8, a remotely detonated antitank mine (similar to improvised explosive devices commonly used in Iraq) killed 4 Americans, and similar attacks on August 19 and 22 wounded 10 more. Mogadishu was fast becoming a free fire zone, and as hostilities escalated, President Clinton approved the dispatch of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) along with a 440-Soldier Joint Special Operations Task Force.

Called Task Force (TF) Ranger, this composite unit was built around a rifle company

and battalion headquarters element from the 75th Ranger Regiment, a detachment from the Army's famed Delta Force, and an aviation element from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), equipped with MH60 Black Hawk utility helicopters and MH6 and AH6 "Little Bird" light helicopters. Small numbers of communicators, Air Force combat controllers and pararescue Airmen, and SEALs were included. TF Ranger, led by JSOC commander Major General William F. Garrison, did not report to General Montgomery as commander of U.S. Forces in Somalia. Instead, as a "strategic asset," it reported directly to USCENTCOM in Tampa, Florida.¹²

Upon arrival, TF Ranger immediately went to work, conducting its first raid against "leadership targets" on August 30. Five other raids took place in September. All were based on short-fuse intelligence and followed a similar tactical pattern: an insertion by MH60 and MH6 helicopters, with Rangers forming an outer perimeter and Delta operators conducting the actual prisoner snatch, supported by a ground convoy to extract detainees and covered by AH6s aloft. These operations met with mixed success. In one, Aided's financier and right-hand man, Osman Otto, was captured. But others betrayed the spotty human

Marine Armored Amphibious Vehicles emerge from surf onto beach at Mogadishu Airport



DOD (Terry Mitchell)

intelligence available to the Americans. In separate instances, the Rangers moved against the headquarters of the UN development program and the offices of *Medicins sans Frontiers* and World Concern, leading aid agencies working in Mogadishu.¹³ Another raid netted the former Mogadishu police chief, well known as a neutral player and not aligned with Aided.¹⁴ As with the raid on the Abdi house, poor human intelligence and a lack of situational awareness plagued TF Ranger operations. Significantly, there was little or no coordination between Garrison and Montgomery.

Supporting intelligence structures also deserve comment. A USCENTCOM intelligence assessment team traveled to Mogadishu in June 1993 and reported that the capture of Aided was “viable and feasible,” though in private, team members described the task as “extremely ugly . . . with numerous potential points of failure.” Regrettably, the USCENTCOM Intelligence Support Element (CISE) in Mogadishu experienced 100 percent turnover in the third week of September 1993. New arrivals were provided an “uneven” transition. JSOC intelligence officers later reported that CISE support to TF Ranger was “minimal,” with a poor focus on critical human intelligence.¹⁵

The Gloves Come Off

In mid-September, the commanding general of the 10th Mountain Division, Major General Dave Mead, sent an explosive personal message to the Chief of Staff of the Army.

(This message, a P4 in military parlance, has never before been made available to the public.) Visiting his troops in Mogadishu, Mead was shocked at what he found:

*Mogadishu is not under our control. Somalia is full of danger. The momentum and boldness of Aided are the prime concern. The trendlines are in the wrong direction. Thus the mission overall and the security of the U.S. Force are threatened.*¹⁶

Mead went on to describe how hundreds of armed Somalis had attacked U.S. combat engineers and Pakistani tank crews in a major

poor human intelligence and a lack of situational awareness plagued Task Force Ranger operations

fight along the 21st of October Road in Mogadishu on September 9. In that engagement, two rifle companies from the QRF infantry battalion rushed to the scene, only to be forced back to their compound under heavy fire. Despite severe losses, Aided’s militia men fought hard and aggressively that day in the face of helicopter gunships, UN armor, and several hundred U.S. infantrymen.

As Mead grasped after only a few days on the ground, conditions in Mogadishu had deteriorated

dramatically. Aided was well aware of the American manhunt and reward offered for his capture. On multiple occasions, he had demonstrated a readiness to take the Americans on directly, despite their advantages in firepower. The national contingents showed no stomach for the campaign to “get” Aided; a number had in fact negotiated private agreements after the Pakistani massacre. With a very limited U.S. force on the ground, UNOSOM II and its American backers were in real trouble:

*This war is the United States versus Aided. We are getting no significant support from any UN country. The war is not going well now and there is no evidence we will win in the end. We have regressed to old ways. Our efforts are not characterized by the use of overwhelming force, not characterized by a commitment to decisive results and victory, not designed to seize the initiative, and there is no simultaneous application of combat power, and not a plan to win quick. All this has the smell and feel of Vietnam, Waco and Lebanon.*¹⁷

General Montgomery, the on-scene commander, apparently did not express the same level of alarm in his reports to General Joseph Hoar, USMC, at USCENTCOM or to UN headquarters in New York. But he was sufficiently worried to request a major addition to his force, in the form of an American mechanized infantry battalion task force equipped with main battle tanks and artillery. This request reached USCENTCOM in mid-month



DOD (Perry Heimer)

LtGen Robert Johnston and Ambassador Robert Oakley (center) greet Congressmen and diplomat arriving to visit troops in Somalia



Ambassador Oakley visits Marines, Mogadishu

and was refused on the grounds that increasing the U.S. “footprint” in Somalia ran counter to the prevailing trends of policy. Montgomery resubmitted a scaled-down version, now asking for a reinforced company of Bradley fighting vehicles and tanks. This time Hoar agreed to pass the request to the Pentagon.

To their credit, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended approval, and the Chairman forwarded the request to Secretary of Defense Les Aspin. The public record does not show that the military leadership pressed hard, however, and given the Clinton administration’s clear intent at the time to downsize the U.S. presence and hand off the mission altogether to the UN—the hunt for Aideded notwithstanding—Aspin’s decision to deny Montgomery’s request was perhaps predictable.

Even as TF Ranger pursued its search for Aideded, other diplomatic venues were being explored. One involved an attempt to open a channel to Aideded using former President Jimmy Carter, who supposedly enjoyed a previous “relationship” with Aideded and had volunteered to act as an intermediary. Although a legitimate policy initiative, this approach was never communicated to the military leadership in Washington, at USCENTCOM headquarters in Tampa, or in Mogadishu. Whether Aideded would have agreed to give up his aspirations to lead Somalia

is doubtful; his most likely motives were to buy time, tone down American pressure, and wait for the inevitable U.S. withdrawal. In any case, the Carter initiative was stillborn. Something was about to happen that would change everything.

Battle of the Black Sea

Mark Bowden’s bestselling *Black Hawk Down*, later adapted into an action movie by Ridley Scott, brought the intimate details of October 3 to a national and even global audience. The day began with reports that a number of key Aideded lieutenants planned to meet at the Olympia Hotel, not far from the Bukhara arms market on Hawlwadig Road. Repeating the mission profile that had been used several times previously, TF Ranger launched 160 special operations force (SOF) soldiers (Rangers, Delta operators, SOF aircrew, and a small number of SEALs and Air Force pararescue specialists) in 16 helicopters and 12 vehicles at 3:30 in the afternoon. (Approximately 110 were inserted by helicopter.) Contrary to some reports, only cursory notification—not preliminary coordination—took place between TF Ranger and UNOSOM II or the QRF. General Garrison notified General Montgomery of the raid as it was being launched, leaving no opportunity for joint mission rehearsals, exchange of communications plans, or discussion of relief operations or linkup procedures under fire.¹⁸

Confident that the mission would be over in an hour, normal mission-essential equipment such as night vision goggles, body armor, and even water was in many cases left behind.¹⁹ Although operating on the same tactical battlefield, both the Rangers and Delta Force maintained separate chains of command, with the senior Delta officer aloft in a command and control aircraft and the senior Ranger commander (Lieutenant Colonel Dan McKnight) in charge of the ground vehicle convoy. On the objective, a Ranger captain and a Delta captain commanded their respective elements, but neither was designated as the on-scene ground commander.

General Garrison exercised overall command from his operations center at the airfield.

Although Somali lookouts reported the launch of the aircraft carrying the raid force, the operation went according to plan until a 160 SOAR Black Hawk, call sign “Super 61,” was shot down about 50 minutes into the mission. (The Somalis fired volleys of rocket-propelled grenades [RPGs] at low-flying aircraft throughout the battle with great success, especially against the larger and less nimble Black Hawks.) This event disrupted the orderly extraction of the Somali detainees and gave Aideded’s militia forces, and hundreds of angry armed civilians, time to flood into the area. Shortly thereafter, a second MH60 (“Super 64”) was shot down. The lone Combat Search and Rescue helicopter (“Super 68”) was able to insert its medics and Ranger security force at the first crash site, but was badly damaged by RPG fire and returned to base. There was no viable preexisting plan to react to a second downed aircraft.

The raid now became a full-fledged battle, later dubbed the Battle of the Black Sea by the SNA. The ground vehicle convoy carrying the captured SNA leaders, led by the Ranger battalion commander, attempted to respond but came under intense close-range fire without reaching the second crash site and was forced to return to the airfield with

Somali National Alliance militia and armed civilian irregulars were underrated by General Garrison and his special operations staff officers

many dead and wounded. A second smaller Ranger column then moved out from the airfield in vehicles but was beaten back not far from its start point. At this point, one rifle company from Montgomery’s QRF was moved to the American-held airfield and attempted to relieve the embattled SOF troopers, but could not advance in the furious city fighting and returned to base. Several hours into the mission, TF Ranger found itself clustered around the two crash sites or pinned down inside several buildings along Marehan Road, unable to disengage from the swarming Somali militia and civilian crowds and unwilling to withdraw without the bodies of their comrades in the downed aircraft.

Unquestionably, the SNA militia and armed civilian irregulars who participated in the battle were underrated by General Garrison



President George H.W. Bush with LtGen Johnston during visit to Somalia

and his special operations staff officers and commanders. Although poorly equipped and undisciplined to American eyes, many were hardened by years of combat. Their ability to mass quickly and fight in large numbers with determination and courage had been amply demonstrated in the days and weeks preceding the October 3 raid. The local SNA commander, Colonel Sharif Hassan Giumale, had trained for 3 years in Russia and later in Italy, fought in the Ogaden against Ethiopia, and commanded a brigade in the SNA before joining Aided during the civil war.²⁰ A number of his subordinates were similarly experienced. Well equipped with RPGs and small arms, they had noted the American tactical pattern and its weaknesses. And they were fighting in their own neighborhoods, in front of their families and their clan leaders. Their effectiveness would be grudgingly admitted after the fight, if not before.

At this point, near sundown, the survival of the raid force was very much in question. Dozens had been killed and wounded, at least two separate rescue attempts had failed, more armed Somalis were arriving by the hour, and ammunition was running dangerously low. Of the seven troop-carrying Black Hawks available, five were no longer flyable. Several special operations soldiers died in the field because medical evacuation by air or ground was impossible. Although Aided's fighters had suffered serious losses, they maintained relentless pressure on the Americans through the night. By most accounts, only the dauntless actions of the AH6 Little Bird pilots, flying all night long, kept the besieged Americans alive until morning.

As night fell, General Garrison concluded that the survival of the force was at risk and requested assistance from UNOSOM II. Over 4 hours, U.S. liaison officers worked feverishly to coordinate a rescue force consisting of Malaysian armored personnel carriers, Pakistani tanks, and two companies from the QRF infantry battalion of the 10th Mountain Division. The 70-vehicle rescue force, accompanied by special operations personnel from Garrison's headquarters and TF Ranger support units, moved out at 11:15 p.m. and painfully fought its way to the encircled Rangers and Delta operators, reaching them at 1:55 a.m.²¹

Most of the survivors were wounded by this point. Moving in vehicles and on foot, and carrying their dead and wounded, the dazed Americans retreated to a soccer stadium just outside the combat zone as dawn broke over

Mogadishu. Though they had fought hard to recover their dead, the bodies of Randy Shugart and Gary Gordon, as well as the dead aircrew and Delta passengers of Super 61 and Super 64, remained behind. Of the TF Ranger troops who had come to Somalia and entered the fight, 17 were dead. 106 were wounded. The Rangers were particularly hard hit, with almost every participant killed or wounded. It was, as the British say, a hard day for the Regiment.²²

Although General Garrison attempted to portray the mission as a success on the grounds that the targeted SNA leaders had been captured, the raid quickly came to be seen as a military and political fiasco. Almost immediately, the Clinton administration came under fierce criticism. Even as a heavy mechanized force was quickly sent in to stabilize the situation, TF Ranger departed and the hunt for Aided was quietly dropped. The following spring, U.S. forces pulled out of Mogadishu for good.

Postmortem

The causes of failure in Mogadishu were not apparent only in hindsight. In many cases, they were fundamental, even blatant; they could, and should, have been identified in advance. Military and civilian leaders in decisionmaking positions bear a heavy share of responsibility for a flawed and ultimately failed policy, and for the unnecessary deaths on all sides that resulted. Our tragic experience in Somalia provides critical lessons for military and civilian leaders who bear similar responsibilities for planning and conducting contingency operations now and in the future.

At the political and strategic level, the Clinton administration failed to provide specific, coherent goals and objectives that could be translated into concrete tasks and missions on the ground in Somalia. If the policy objective was "the restoration of an entire country," then the trust and confidence placed in the UN was *misplaced*, while the resources provided by the United States were manifestly inadequate. In particular, the decision to disarm the clans, beginning with Aided, was pregnant with consequence. It forced the United States and UN to abandon the neutrality that had helped make *Restore Hope* successful at a time when American military power was growing weaker every day. And it drew the modest U.S. forces in Somalia into high-intensity combat operations for which they were not prepared or equipped. The June 5 slaughter of the Pakistanis may or may not have been planned in advance, but the battle lines had been drawn between Aided

and the United States well before then. Whatever options applied before that date went up in smoke as soon as the extent of the tragedy became apparent. UNOSOM II now faced only two choices: to retaliate by taking down Aided, or to get out of Somalia.

Inside the Beltway, an air of detachment prevailed. No real attempt was made to secure congressional or popular support, an oversight that caused immediate policy failure when casualties mounted. Requests for forces from field commanders were airily dismissed. Long on rhetoric and short on detail, easily distracted by the pressures of domestic politics and other foreign policy challenges and opportunities, the Clinton national security team lost focus on perhaps the most dangerous foreign policy issue then in play. There was a ground truth about conditions in Somalia waiting to be grasped. The military commanders there saw it clearly. But somewhere between the gutted U.S. compound in Mogadishu and the West Wing, that reality evaporated.

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At the operational level, the command relationships established to control forces in Mogadishu proved almost tragicomic. The USCENTCOM commander in Tampa exercised operational control of two separate combat forces, Garrison's TF Ranger and the 10th Mountain Division QRF. Those threads came together *only* in Tampa. No command relationship existed between the two, though they were located 5 minutes apart.²³ The commander of U.S. Forces in Somalia exercised no operational authority over any combat forces; at best he could "borrow" the QRF for short periods, subject to USCENTCOM approval. The failure to designate one officer to command U.S. combat forces in Mogadishu stemmed from the desire of the combatant commander to remain "in charge" and contributed directly to the loss of life in the battle of October 3 and 4. The presence of two major generals, each commanding no more than a few hundred combatants, in the same city during the same ferocious engagement, and linked by little more than their good intentions, predictably caused confusion and delay.

Operational level planning and the resources made available based on it were also badly flawed. As General Mead clearly pointed out, the situation in Mogadishu in September had dramatically changed for the worse. The U.S. forces present there were too small and too lightly armed for the mission. General Montgomery's request for heavy reinforcements lends support to this assessment, as does the urgent decision to send them in force days after the battle. General Garrison's request for return of the AC-130 gunships is a similar case in point. U.S. forces manifestly required reinforcement, yet military leaders in the chain of command failed to make a vigorous case—with painful and damaging results.

Tactically, SOF in Somalia, lacking context and situational awareness, suffered from overconfidence (Mead's communication shows fairly clearly that the conventional force did not). Virtually all of the advantages possessed by the U.S. military were thrown away: a small force went into a massive urban area, in daylight, without surprise, against greatly superior numbers, without adequate fire support, good intelligence, or a strong reserve. Under these conditions, a well-trained, well-equipped U.S. force with a clear technology overmatch fought at every disadvantage, suffered appalling losses, and came close to annihilation. These risks were run not because hard intelligence had located Aided, but to attempt the capture of a few midlevel subordinates.

Many tactical errors were fundamental: the failure by TF Ranger to adequately brief and rehearse the 10th Mountain QRF; the decision by small unit leaders to leave behind mission-essential equipment;²⁴ the bifurcated command relationships both inside and outside TF Ranger (which ensured that even individual soldiers fighting in the same room reported to different leaders from different organizations); the repeated use of the same mission template, which allowed the enemy to learn and adapt to American tactics;²⁵ poor operational security that telegraphed the start of the raid; the use of fragile and thin-skinned helicopters at low level over the city in daylight; the failure to plan for the loss of multiple aircraft (not unlikely given the mission profile); the poor intelligence picture on the capabilities and intentions of the SNA; and the hesitation shown in requesting immediate assistance from the UN all reflect poorly on the commanders involved in planning and executing the raid. The American Soldiers who fought the Battle of the Black Sea

deserve every accolade bestowed on them. But they paid dearly for such glory.

The lessons of Somalia are hard, but they are clear. Political leaders must be unambiguous about defining the mission and the conditions for success. Congressional and public support is important and deserves effort and attention. The means provided must be sufficient to the task in size and capability. Multiple, competing chains of command do not work; a single joint commander should be empowered to conduct operations and trusted, not second-guessed. Senior commanders an ocean away cannot control local tactical operations and should not try. Finally, the Soldier on the ground in contact with an enemy deserves every advantage America can provide.

The biggest lesson from Somalia is also the simplest. The fight that took place on October 3, 1993, in Mogadishu was a small unit action, a local tactical operation similar to the several that preceded it. But its effects were devastating to the administration, to the Nation, and to American foreign policy. Whenever U.S. Soldiers go in harm's way, they carry America's prestige and credibility with them. If they fail, America's enemies are emboldened and empowered. American power and influence can suffer dramatically for years to come, with impacts that reach far beyond the original mission or policy. America saw that on Marehan Road, now many years ago. We ought not take that road again. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ This report came from Andrew S. Natsios, then-administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development.

² Robert B. Oakley, "An Envoy's Perspective," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Autumn 1993), 45.

³ See General Joseph Hoar, USMC, "A CINC's Perspective," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Autumn 1993), 59.

⁴ At the time, Oakley was in retirement and held the distinction of being one of only four "Career Ambassadors," the highest rank in the foreign officer hierarchy.

⁵ Jonathan T. Dworken, "RESTORE HOPE: Coordinating Relief Operations," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Summer 1995), 15.

⁶ The inexperience in senior government of key players in framing policy toward Somalia is vital to understanding what transpired. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin and U.S. Ambassador to the United

Nations (UN) Madeleine Albright had never held senior executive branch positions. National Security Advisor Anthony Lake had served for many years in academe and took little interest in Somalia until the crisis erupted.

⁷ Richard J. Norton, "Somalia II," in *Case Studies in Policy Making and Implementation*, ed. David A. Williams, 6th ed. (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, 2002), 168. See also Dorcas Eva McCoy, "American Post-Cold War Images and Foreign Policy Preferences toward 'Dependent' States: A Case Study of Somalia," *World Affairs* (Summer 2000), 2.

⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 837.

⁹ Norton, 178.

¹⁰ J. Marcus Hicks, *Fire in the City: Airpower in Urban, Smaller-Scale Contingencies* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: School of Advanced Airpower Studies, June 1999), 74. After the loss of one Spectre gunship, caused when a 105mm round went off in the breach of the gun while in flight, the AC-130s were withdrawn. A subsequent request from General Garrison for their return was denied by Secretary Aspin.

¹¹ George Monbiot, "Both saviour and victim: Black Hawk Down creates a new and dangerous myth of American nationhood," *The Guardian*, January 29, 2002.

¹² Norton, 172.

¹³ Monbiot, 2.

¹⁴ Norton, 172.

¹⁵ James T. Faust, *Task Force Ranger in Somalia* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Personal Experience Monograph, March 1999), 13.

¹⁶ Personal message from commanding general, 10th Mountain Division, to the Army Chief of Staff, September 15, 1993, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁸ Information provided to author by staff officer personally present in the UNOSOM II headquarters at the time.

¹⁹ Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 39.

²⁰ Rick Atkinson, "The Raid That Went Wrong," *The Washington Post*, January 30, 1994, A1.

²¹ Rick Atkinson, "Night of a Thousand Casualties," *The Washington Post*, January 31, 1994, A1.

²² Somali leaders put their losses at 314 dead and 814 wounded. See Atkinson, "Night of a Thousand Casualties." Atkinson traveled to Mogadishu after the battle and personally interviewed SNA leaders.

²³ Interview with a U.S. staff officer assigned to the U.S. Forces Somalia command group in Mogadishu at the time.

²⁴ Bowden, 39.

²⁵ Atkinson, "The Raid That Went Wrong," A1.